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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to examine a restructured inner-city school and a second-grade teacher's personal and collaborative efforts to teach all of her students to become literate. To do so, she needed to adopt a feminist view recasting the teacher's role in school reform as that of an individual with knowledge who can act upon the world, rather than that of a passive, retrainable object. The case study evolved over 4 years through twice-monthly classroom observations and interviews with a university research team, monthly group conversations with other beginning teachers, and personal instructional research with students. It speaks to the personal and professional risk a teacher must take to achieve self-actualization in voicing opinions, teaching in a responsible and equitable manner, and reporting valuable knowledge to others. Implications for teacher education include discussing with students the problems and successes of practice and the differences between public perceptions and private realities of schooling; ongoing, nonjudgmental support and response to teachers' perceptions; encouraging teacher research of their own practices; providing an audience for teachers' voices; and valuing teachers' ways of knowing centered on children and caring. (LL)

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Occasional Paper 134

CHOICE, RISK, AND TEACHER VOICE: CLOSING THE DISTANCE BETWEEN PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS AND PRIVATE REALITIES OF SCHOOLING

Sandra Hollingsworth and
Leslie Turner Minarik

Institute for Research on Teaching

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Abstract

This paper takes a close-up look at an inner-city school and a second-grade teacher's personal and collaborative efforts to teach all of her students to become literate. To do so Leslie Minarik had to come to understand her students both academically and socially. Her success required that she challenge her own personal beliefs about literacy instruction, what she was taught in her teacher education program, the community realities of the district's new system of "choice," the state's mandated literacy program, the literacy program publisher's recommendations, professional development plans which discouraged her from interacting in professional conferences, her peers' convictions about the best way to teach reading and writing, and her feelings about the personal cost of her efforts to her own family life.

Leslie's story has developed over four years through twice-monthly classroom observations and interviews with a university research team, monthly group conversations with other beginning teachers, and her own instructional research with her students. It speaks to the personal and professional risk she must take to tell her story, teach in a responsible and equitable manner, and report her valuable knowledge to others. Her private and close-up knowledge challenges the distant and objective findings on what is needed for literacy instruction and school reform--in surprising and visionary means. The telling of Leslie's story also brings close up ethical questions and challenges to all of us who work collaboratively with teachers.

CHOICE, RISK, AND TEACHER VOICE: CLOSING THE DISTANCE BETWEEN PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS AND PRIVATE REALITIES OF SCHOOLING[1]

Sandra Hollingsworth and Leslie Turner Minarik[2]

The words of this not-yet-popular song came out of the radio in my sports car and flew up into the clear, deep blue of a California sky one afternoon as I was driving back to Berkeley from Leslie Minarik's urban classroom in Richmond:

From a distance
We all have enough
And no one is in need[3]

The song reminded me of the television special that had aired the night before about Richmond's new educational plan, known as a "system of choice." From the distant stance of public television, smiling supporters told us that the newly reorganized school district brought the promise of better education for everyone. The TV cameras didn't close in on the private realities of noisy-silence at Leslie's school, where only that morning she had watched one of her second-grade children become the victim of a gang fight on the playground. Leslie called for administrative help five times without anyone coming. She jumped in to help the child, pulling off the older third and fourth graders, but they turned their fists on her and she had to stop. I arrived soon after the event. It was understandably difficult for her to bring her mind back to teaching. She reconvened her class with an intimate discussion of caring and problem solving (From field notes, LM: 4/12/89:2).

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[1]Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association annual meeting, Chicago, April 1991.

[2]Sandra Hollingsworth, an assistant professor of teacher education at Michigan State University, is a senior researcher with the Institute for Research on Teaching working on the Students' Response to Literacy Instruction Project. Leslie Turner Minarik is a teacher at Highland Elementary School in Richmond, California.

[3]From a Distance (1987). Julie Gold, BMI Records.

Leslie is in the center of a complex dilemma. As a second-grade teacher and a mother, she has a unique and close-up understanding of education which is within and often opposed to the more-distanced public/administrative perspective (see Figure 1). Leslie understands the opposing view; she was employed in the business world before making a midcareer shift into teaching. Since power-neutral collaborative structures to join those paradigms are not readily forthcoming in education, resolving the tension between the two requires a sort of perceptual collaboration, taking into account both public/administrative or economically oriented analyses of schooling and personal/teacher or feminist critique.

Current solutions to problems at such schools from an administrative perspective suggest both restructuring schools and "retraining" teachers. One popular idea for school restructuring is to permit parental choice in schools, teachers, and curriculum, thereby maximizing opportunities for success for their children. Ideally, choice will "foster equality of opportunity, help parents play their proper roles with respect to the education of their children, and stimulate autonomy among schools, professionalism among teachers, and good leadership on the part of principals" (Finn, 1990, p. 4). Such a plan is also favorable to administrators who judge the success of such programs on their aggregate quantitative outcomes, because schools of choice are places where "students learn more" and the "mechanism for accountability is potent" (p. 4).

From a teachers' perspective more weight is placed on the close-up realities of the approach. Teachers question whether *there is an actual choice*--for parents, children, or themselves. Looking closely reveals a great deal of choice for *some* parents and students, a limited amount for others with less socioeconomic status, and almost none for teachers (Doyle, 1990). The attempt of this paper is to inform, and thereby narrow, the perceptual distance between the public ideology and the reality of teachers' choices. In particular, making a case for and detailing the processes of amplifying teachers' voices about the distance may serve to minimize power distinctions and make administrative-teacher choices in schools more collaborative.

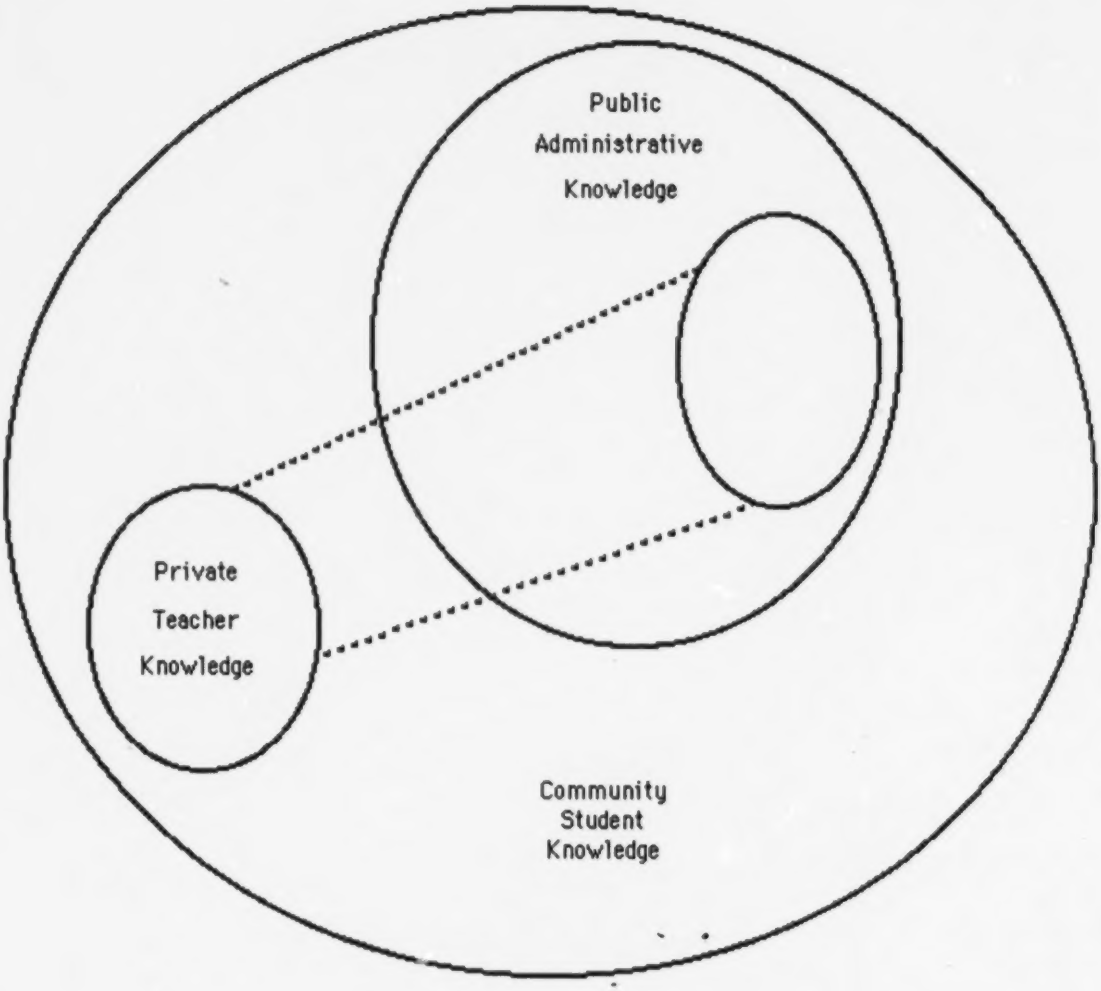

Figure 1. Perceptual collaboration.

Teachers' Ways of Knowing: Public Perceptions and Private Realities

Little public voice is currently given to restructuring efforts which will *support teachers' choices* to improve schooling. One would hope that is the case because teachers' choices are not well known. Perhaps, however, it is thus because teachers are distantly perceived as incapable of making such choices. The public/private perception of teachers' knowledge parallels the teacher/administrative split diagram in Figure 1. From a public/administrative distanced perspective, teachers are publicly portrayed as less than bright, improperly educated in disciplinary subjects, and needing external career reward systems to motivate them to learn more (Carnegie Forum, 1986; Holmes Group, 1986).

> Teachers have been blamed individually for unimaginative and superficial teaching, for the high drop out rate of certain groups of students, for the perceived failures of the school to turn out happy and employed students. (Weiler, 1988, p. 122)

A typically proposed solution to this dilemma is to repair teachers' knowledge through staff development situations. The idea that teachers are passively retrainable is based on an epistemological position that

> knowledge is quantifiable and students are the passive recipients of knowledge. The role of teachers then becomes that of the dispenser of knowledge. . . . [T]he vision of . . . feminist teachers and administrators is deeply opposed to this view of learning and teaching. Instead, they emphasize that students are knowers and creators of knowledge. (Weiler, 1988, p. 122)

Kathleen Weiler's critique suggests that not only students but administrators and teachers are creators of knowledge. Unlike administrators, teachers' capacities to create knowledge may be limited by socialized perceptions of their role. They may not actually be in need of repair, but release. The recent work in feminist epistemology confirms such a possibility. Belenkey, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) have found five major epistemological categories in women:

> *Silence*, a position in which women experience themselves as mindless and voiceless and subject to the whims of external authority; *received knowledge*, a perspective from which women conceive of themselves as capable of receiving, even reproducing, knowledge from the all-knowing external authorities but not

> capable of creating knowledge on their own; *subjective knowledge*, a perspective from which truth and knowledge are conceived of a personal, private, and subjectively known or intuited; *procedural knowledge*, a position in which women are invested in learning and applying objective procedures for obtaining and communicating knowledge; and *constructed knowledge*, a position in which women view all knowledge as contextual, experience themselves as creators of knowledge, and value both subjective and objective strategies for knowing. (p. 15)

Others have argued that teachers may construct knowledge and make choices centered around a perspective of care and connection, not objectivity and distance (Jackson, 1987; Noddings, 1984). Those involved, as I am, in close-up work with teachers have learned that the problems of school have less to do with unknowing, thoughtless teachers, and more with the institutional constraints placed on their possibilities of coming to know--or, in feminist terms, "finding their own voices" (Gilligan, 1982). The current structures of school may even unwittingly keep teachers in positions of received, subjective, or procedural knowledge. This perceptual distortion then suggests excluding their voices from discussions of knowledge creation--such as school restructuring.

My collaborative work with Leslie and other teachers contains compelling evidence for recasting the role of teachers in school reform as *subjects* who have knowledge and can act upon the world, rather than *objects* who must be told what to know. This work suggests changing old and new school structures to allow teachers to collaborate, reflect upon, create, and solve their own contextually relevant classroom dilemmas. With teachers as partners in research, I'm also finding patterns which demonstrate that current proposals for school change made from distant perspectives tend to support children of the dominant classes at the expense of the subordinately classed children, and thus may be less than useful for the real and complex world (see Hollingsworth et al., 1991).

I'm learning to hear teachers' close-up stories, questions, experiments, and choices as direction for what we *might be* about in school reform. I hear the struggle to make public their own knowledges, centered around an ethos of care, to claim voice, and work together to remain in urban classrooms and help students succeed. The test of worthwhile knowledge for critical/ feminist teachers with whom I work is not whether it is "true" by objective standards but whether it

leads to progressive change (Weiler, 1988). The lack of choice or voice in their own professional lives keeps such important insights from public view and causes many of them to consider other professional choices.

Obviously, not all teachers remain in schools. Similar to Hirschman in his classic 1970 volume on "exit, voice, and loyalty" in the business world, I've found a feminist correlate to the dilemmas of schooling (see Figure 2). Teachers often remain publicly silent about their privately voiced critiques of school structures and curricula. Remaining in the classroom out of loyalty to an employer is a choice made by many female and male teachers. When the difficulties become unbearable (or unheard if voiced), a second choice for teachers is to abandon the loyal position and leave the school, creating a permanent silence.

The middle ground--where teachers choose to stay--is noisier and messier. It's the place where private truths become public. Where loyalty, recast as fidelity, becomes a relational way of being (Noddings, 1986). It's the place where real and intimate relationships are formed, public policies and statements are challenged, and shifts take place so that teachers can not only stay but fully contribute to progressive change. It's in that middle-ground, where public and private perceptions meet, that I now know Leslie and other beginning teachers who've remained. It's there, where risks occur, that the present story takes place. As Leslie's story unfolds, I'll work to connect it to others' stories, to find some patterns in the process of what teachers do to recognize, clarify, and use their personal voices to make schools better worlds for children, regardless of the larger public picture where choice is less available.

The Background and Method of Leslie's Narrative

Leslie and I have been working together since she began her graduate career as an elementary credential candidate in 1986 at the University of California, Berkeley. She and 27 other elementary and secondary teachers (the latter in math and science) talked to me (and a team of research assistants) about their learning to teach. During those years of the study, I was primarily interested in their learning about reading instruction and limited my consideration of their voices to ways that their beliefs and backgrounds shaped what they were learning (see Hollingsworth,

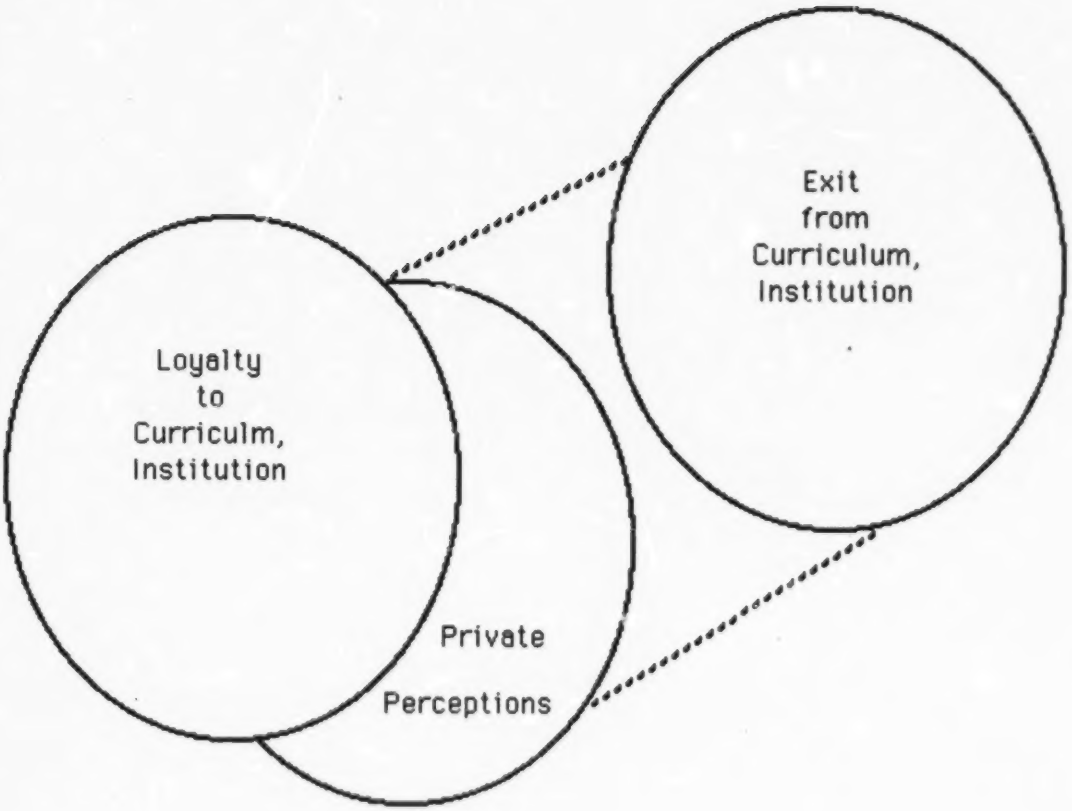

Figure 2. Voice development, Phase I: Silence.

1989b). After graduation, eight teachers, roughly representative of the whole group, decided to continue our research and mutual support. For the last four years, I've visited teachers' classrooms twice a month, collecting traditional data in the form of running narratives of reading and writing lessons, videotapes, audiotaped interviews, teachers' written summaries, and periodic collection of students' work. We also met socially once a month and talked about learning to teach. Those conversations were taped and transcribed and became rich sources of information about finding voice.

Because teachers used the data and analyses to improve their work, they were coded and summarized as we went along using a constant comparison method of analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Periodically, we looked back across the evidence we'd gathered to trace particular themes and prepare written summaries. For example, I've noticed the difference between private talk and public information in our conversations and observations and knew that developing voice was an important part of our collaborative work together. I did not link the two and look for the *process of teachers' claiming voice*, however, until it became clear that it was an important process to understand as a perceptual bridge between the public and private knowledges. When I heard the words in the song "From a Distance" after visiting Leslie, I intuitively sensed that private voice relative to public "truths" was important to document and thus made plans to reanalyze, write, and share this perspective within our collaborative work. I asked Leslie if she was ready to risk the voicing of her story. When she agreed, we decided to prepare a collaborative narrative as a summary. Specific data sources and earlier analyses are cited throughout the narrative.

Connecting Public and Private Voices: The Choice for Teachers

Leslie's story is a close-up look at an urban school and her personal and collaborative efforts to teach all of her second-grade students to become literate. To do so she had to understand her students both academically and socially. Her success required that she challenge her own personal beliefs about literacy instruction, what she was taught in her teacher education program, the community realities of the district's new choice structure, the state's mandated literacy program, the literacy program publisher's recommendations, professional development plans

which discouraged her from interacting in professional conferences, her peers' convictions about the best way to teach reading and writing, and her feelings about the personal cost of her efforts to her own family life.

Leslie speaks to the personal and professional risk she must take to remain in the classroom, tell her story, teach in a responsible and equitable manner, and report her valuable knowledge to others. Her private and close-up knowledge challenges the distant and objective findings on what is needed for literacy instruction and school reform--in surprising and visionary means. The telling of her story also brings close up the ethical questions and challenges to all of us who work collaboratively with teachers. To distinguish her words from mine, I'll use italics when she speaks.

Leslie began her work as a new teacher with a publicly supported focus on curricular activities. Her emotional, care-filled reflections about students remained private. She talked to her family or wrote about her experiences in an effort to understand.

> *I'm tired. I wasn't so tired earlier. It is not a physical weariness. It is a case of wanting to forget--an emotional weariness.*
>
> *I came home with my bag, full as usual. Tonight I planned to review the rest of the year and get an idea in my head of what the children should work on before we leave for summer vacation. I want to make sure we don't miss anything. I want the end of the year to be important for them. They deserve a good send off to third grade. I'll miss them. All of this goes through my mind. Instead of my work I'll probably read my mystery book--which I keep on my nightstand just for these occasions--when I need to forget for awhile what is happening in the "environment" I spend my days in. If the environment were just my room and the children I wouldn't feel this way. The reality is that the "educational environment" is my room and the children AND the administration AND the community. How many people who write about education include these other areas? And I keep hearing the words of a gentlemen at last year's [professional conference] in Boston who spoke of the need to teach teachers to teach better and to teach them to learn faster. . . .*
>
> *I can't help thinking of a particular student. He has been on my mind. He was so special. He transferred into my room late in the year. He was so depressed and out of touch with school. He got into trouble, and yet he had turned around. Someone very special came to work with him each Friday. His reading was so much better. He smiled. He came to school each day. Now he is gone. Last week when I ran into him in the hall during my prep-time he had a smile on his face. His mother brought him to school to say she was pulling him out. He wanted to tell me. The reasons behind his mother's action are private. We talk about them at school. We don't print them. Maybe we can't. I heard he is in a foster home now. I--we--can't help him. I feel he is lost, and except for the tears I'm shedding now,*

I try to forget all about this because if I hurt too much for him I can't do a good job. I have to stay to teach the others.

The children are wonderful. That is the only unchanging truth. That is why I do what I do. And I keep hearing the voice of the nice gentleman who wanted us to learn to be better teachers. Does anyone from the "outside" ever spend any time in a classroom? Maybe they all want to forget more than we do.

I feel better now. I don't know why. (Private journal, LM: 3/7/88, pp. 1-2)

Leslie also spoke privately about the emotions of her work at a monthly meeting with the seven other beginning teachers in our collaborative study. Recently, she summarized her experiences in writing. Her story also chronicles the development of voice among both the male and female teachers in our monthly group (Transcripts, Collaborative meetings, CM: 2-6/87, 88).

For more than five years I have been involved in a teacher/researcher collaborative group. The focus topic for the group was to be reading instruction and often has been. The group's support and assistance in helping me explore and evaluate my way through language arts curriculum has been immeasurable. However, it was not infrequent that the teachers in the group could not begin by discussing reading. A wealth of "stuff" had to be unloaded, vented, cried about and shared before we could discuss "our main topic" the reading curriculum. Dr. Hollingsworth, wisely, but with some frustration, listened and then tried to guide us back on track. I can picture many such evenings.

I mention this, because, while these occurrences sound unimportant, they were the beginning for me and others in the group (over half of whom have now left for other jobs) of an awareness of serious, unspoken problems in teaching which were not mentioned in teacher education programs, and which are still not talked about in newspapers or in in-service programs for teachers. The "stuff" we had to talk about were serious issues that as teachers we face each day, but are not acknowledged by universities who focus on "curriculum" issues or who address teachers on subjects that departments of education are interested in. They are not necessarily addressed by district officials who then don't seem to want to know. Teachers are quiet and talk only among themselves so word doesn't get out.

It shocks me, having come from a number of years in the business world, that teachers aren't more vocal. Perhaps it is historically the role the U.S. gave teachers who were mostly female. . . . As a matter of fact, at a recent meeting between the teachers at my elementary school and the district superintendent, teachers attempted to protest moving their principal to another site because it was not in the best interest of the school. The teachers were silenced with the comment that "teachers do not run the schools." Further, the silence in teachers' voices can also be traced to university faculty who are distantly involved in education away from schools, who write research papers that influence district policies, yet who don't consult with teachers who work in the reality of those policies. Teachers are silent because no one wants to hear. . . . (Written summary [WS], LM: 1/30/91, p. 1)

Developing Voice: Phase I

During my first year I stayed inside the classroom, so to speak. Prompted by the emphasis in my teacher education program and a last-minute district-level assignment to Grades 2-3 (after I'd spent the summer preparing curriculum for my original assignment, Grade 5), I was artificially consumed with curriculum. I saw

> *curriculum not only my primary role and responsibility, but as the only feature of of my work I could really give voice to. By my third year in the classroom I saw it differently. I had to face some broader issues.* (WS, LM: 1/30/91, pp. 1-2)

Before her third year, Leslie had tried hard to stay within the boundaries established for her as a teacher. She was loyal to the idea of education and believed that it was incumbent upon her to learn the best methods it could offer from research. If she could learn it well enough, all of her second-grade students would become literate. Her own ideas, opinions, and even the propensity that she had shown as a student teacher to focus on children (Hollingsworth, 1989a) were silenced. Leslie was sharply self-critical of her inability to measure up to the research models in language arts.

> *Given the focus of student teaching and new teacher evaluation, it seems there's only one shot at getting it right. It's very different from a career phase-in as an apprentice in the business world.* (Classroom interview; 2/5/87, p.4)

Leslie gave herself a limited amount of time to "get a handle" on curriculum, or return to the business world.

Near the end of this phase of voice development, she, like the others, had developed routines for her curricular knowledge and could once again bring her attention back to children (Hollingsworth, 1989b). With children in the center, her perspective broadened. She focused on what she could do *inside* her classroom and contrasted that perspective with what might be done *outside* of it. Leslie was beginning to recognize her own voice--to identify the dissonance between her internal or private perceptions of her world and the public representations of it.

> *I really thought curriculum was key in my student teaching, and I think that's not a real priority, not to say that a teacher shouldn't know her curriculum well and study curriculum, and be well-versed in a variety of curriculum. But when you actually teach, that's of secondary importance. It's the students and what's happening and how they're getting excited, and what their problems are and where they are. That's the number one priority. And then the curriculum interfaces with [the students]. That would probably be the most significant change, I think I've made, in the way I see things.* (Classroom interview, 6/1/89, p. 3)

At this point, it seems that Leslie was ending the first of three phases in articulating her voice where she neither needed to use the silences of either blind loyalty or exit in her work as a teacher (see Figure 2). In Weiler's terms, Leslie was developing consciousness.

> Women's consciousness includes both hegemonic ideas from the male tradition and the possibilities of critical consciousness of what Gramsci (1971) called "good sense." . . . We must interrogate our own consciousness, language, and ways of knowing in order to come to see the realities of our own relationships. In this way, feminism asks for a radical reappraisal not only of our practices, but of consciousness itself. (Weiler, 1988)

In Hirschman's (1970) terms, Leslie was beginning to break traditional loyalty with the institution. Following Noddings (1986), she had recast loyalty as fidelity to herself and her school, not in the way it *is*, but in the way it *could be*.

Not all of the teachers in our group stayed loyal as long as Leslie did. In our second year together, most of them entered the second phase of developing voice (see Table 1). Their critique of the institution of school was often too dissonant for Leslie at that point, who was temporarily "consumed with curriculum" requirements. She missed several meetings out of frustration.

Developing Voice: Phase II

From a distance
You look like my friend, even though we are at war
From a distance
I can't comprehend what all this war is for

An externally stimulated event caused Leslie to sharply contrast her private focus on appropriate curriculum development for her students with public requirements for curriculum. This experience, shared by all the teachers in our group, brought Leslie more in line with her peers, gave her a common cause, and made her question her loyalty to the new school policies (CM: 2/5/88).

> *Perhaps it started when our district adopted a new literature based reading series. Previously, I had been doing a "whole-language" program as the district was in transition and wasn't very definitive about what we were to use. However, when the new series came out, the other second grade teacher and I decided to give it a try. The district mandated its use in several memos we later received. We immediately sensed a problem. We knew our students enough to know that many would not be able to achieve any degree of success with the grade level book only, so we call downtown and asked if we could have classroom sets of the third and final first grade books. The response was a loud "No! Your students should be reading on grade level." Both of us thought this was rather amusing since the district frequently let us know how far below our test scores were in reading on the achievement tests. The amusement faded and we felt abandoned. The message was that they didn't really care about the kids. I finally got outside help from Dr. Hollingsworth for the third of my class that year who could not use the text. Other teachers have had similar experiences. We now, quietly, do what is best for the children. (*WS, LM: 1/30/91, pp. 2-3) (See also Hollingsworth & Minarik, 1990.)

Table 1

Teachers' Voice Progression

	Loyalty	Voice	Exit
Beginning Year 3		3 teachers	5 teachers
Beginning Year 2	1 teacher	4 teachers	3 teachers
Beginning Year 1	2 teachers	5 teachers	1 teacher
Preservice Year	7 teachers	one teacher	

Leslie and her peers were working in the second phase of voice development--its clarification and claiming (see Figure 3). This phase required collaborative support to take risks, negotiate structures (Weiler, 1988), and locate alternative solutions which speak to private realities. Leslie not only found help from our teachers' group in this process but from Karen Teel, a doctoral student and research assistant who worked with her collaboratively--helping Leslie research new methods which led to alternative solutions (see Teel & Minarik, 1990).

> *The voice that I have found, has in part resulted from my participation with the collaborative group. While we started off rather traditionally, the fact that Dr. Hollingsworth listened to the "stuff" and talked it over with us gave it validity. In addition, Karen Teel, who spent much time with me in the classroom, also felt a need to change our teacher/researcher relationship so that we ended by tackling issues that I, as a classroom teacher, really needed to deal with to be a good teacher and they weren't always "curriculum" issues.* (WS, LM: 1/30/91, p. 5)

Developing Voice: Phase III

From a distance
There is harmony and it echoes through the land

By the time Leslie's district implemented its new plan of choice on the heels of its directive change in reading curriculum, she had both the clarification and the support she needed to enter the third phase of her voice development: creating her own collaborative groups, designing her own research, and going public with her knowledge--in effect, becoming an authority with a voice equal to the established authority. Like the other teachers in our group, Leslie risked both loyalty and exit to speak to the distance in an attempt to close the gap between public perceptions and private realities of urban schools. Her critique incorporated her students' voices as well.

> *Our district instituted a new program. Many elementary schools now have periods, much like junior high schools. Students choose a number of elective classes. In brief the new program was to increase students' enthusiasm for school and thereby increase their test scores.*
>
> *Teachers were not consulted about whether we thought the program would work for our students. "Open forums" which we were asked to attend to discuss the new program, tended to discourage teachers from asking questions, making suggestions or presenting modifications. Teachers had a number of concerns, but I believe the two most serious from their perspective were (1) that moving around between 4-5 different teachers and student groups 4 days a week would be very difficult for many of our students who come from unstable family situations and who need bonding and consistency; and that (2) less time with their primary teachers who know them well could result in a less solid educational foundation.*

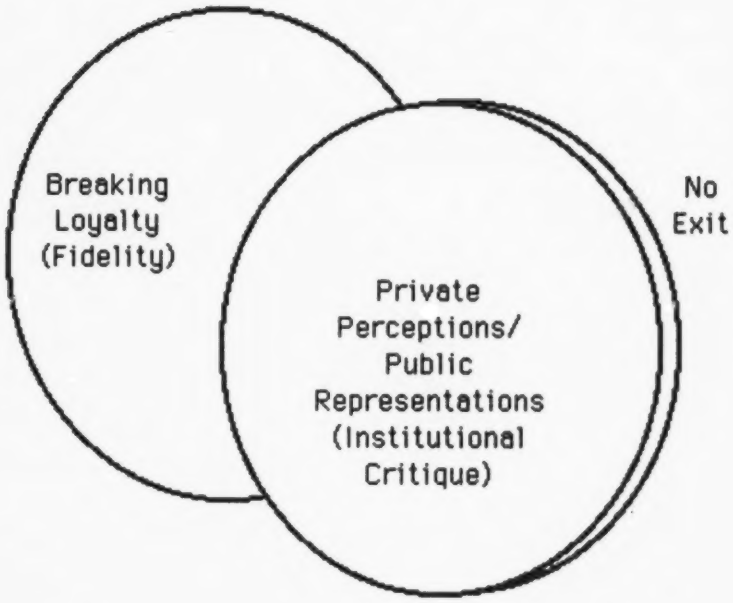

Figure 3. Voice development, Phase II: Clarification and claiming.

Certainly, in theory, this "system of choice" would give every student access to all sorts of electives and would give each of them a balanced program. In reality, we have students who take P.E. classes twice a day and never sign up for a science class. We have students whose parents cannot read or understand the program and let their 8-year-olds fill out their own programs. . . . As a parent in the district, I know from experience that it took some time and quite a bit of negotiating before my husband, our daughter and I came up with a schedule. My daughter thought tap, jazzercize, art and drama were great. We checked to make sure there was a PE class and reading, math, writing, science or some other academic subject.

Teachers at my school grew increasingly uncomfortable knowing that the ideological appeal behind the plan was one thing (who could be against free choice?), but the reality was another. In actuality, there was discrimination against many children. They were not all getting the best education. So the primary teachers quietly met, on their own time, to devise a system that would insure that each child got science, computer classes, etc. We also were uncomfortable with the fact that there were no reading and writing classes offered and less core time to help students who needed extra work. . . . After many hours, the teachers devised a program. Volunteers were to teach classes that we agreed were best for the students. Several teachers even put together programs in basic math and phonics because many of their children "needed" such instruction. There was a great feeling that we would really be able to help the children. It was done quietly and discreetly, with the approval of an administrator who was willing to look the other way sometimes. Unfortunately, a number of circumstances changed at the district level (including having to relocate to another earthquake-safe school site) and the program was never realized, but we haven't given up. We are trying again, working with (and around the district if necessary) to do the best for the children. (WS, LM: 1/30/91, pp. 3-4)

Leslie's words show us that a knowing voice doesn't need to be loud--just clear, definite and action-oriented. Tracing her transformation of developing voice from a perspective of feminist epistemology (Belenky et al., 1986), we see that she has gone from a position of received knowledge to constructed knowledge. Her collaborative work (initially with the other teachers and me in our research group, then with Karen Teel in her classroom, then with other teachers in her school) gave her the connected and sustaining relationships necessary for such an epistemological change. Leslie not only changed her beliefs about what curriculum to teach her children, she changed her understanding of what it meant to be knowledgeable. Drawing upon but not dependent on outside knowledge, she now even moved past the point of recognizing the discrepancy between her own experiences and what others said those experiences should be to claiming her own considered experience as knowledge and acting upon it. She has reached the point of self-actualization in voice--from a feminist perspective of care.

> It is this striving for the best in ourselves and in those with whom we interact that marks self-actualization, and a community that embraces this view of fidelity has a strong rationale for socialization, for it is not asking for fidelity to institutions as they are but as they might realistically be at their best. Further, fidelity is never given first to either self as individual or to institution, but to the others with whom we are in relation and to the relations by which we are defined. (Noddings, 1986, p. 501)

Leslie's self is not only independent in her knowing but connected to the knowing of others, including that received from curricular or institutional mandates which apply to her perspectives and meet the needs of her students. Her voice creates a potential bridge between the public and private realities of school (see Figure 4). Her goals for improving instruction for urban students and that of her district are the same. But Leslie's primary validation and satisfaction comes from her increased closeness with her peers and her students which results from the work toward improving academic achievement--and not the reverse. She has a hope for the same relationship with school administrators.

Bridging the Distance: The Next Chapter

It's the hope of hopes
It's the love of loves
It's the song of everyone.

The belief in both the goal and the process of closing the distance between the public and private realities of schooling keeps Leslie in the classroom, even though her school district is now on the verge of bankruptcy. Many teachers and support staff are targeted for possible layoffs. To many, exit may appear to be the most logical choice. Leslie is troubled by the recent events, but she's not leaving, nor is she complaining.

The process of coming to know that Leslie has created can serve as a bridge between any distanced form of expert knowledge and that which she realizes is necessary for her children's social and academic progress. Whether the external expertise takes the form of mandated programs, required curricular materials, or educational research, Leslie has a means for assessing and modifying that knowledge with her own. Care for her students guides the process:

> *Recent research (as translated to us by district official and textbook publishers) suggests that reading groups by ability are bad and should be abolished. Heterogeneous grouping is the new program. . . . A salesperson for the new*

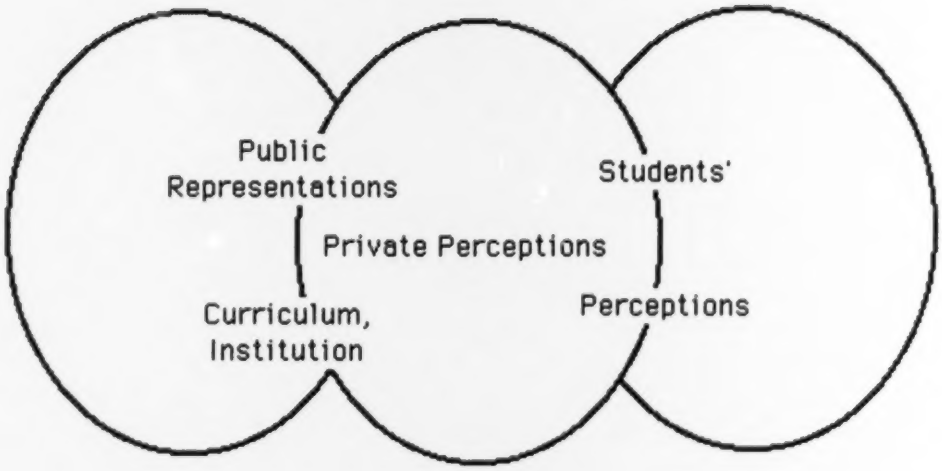

Figure 4. Voice development, Phase III: Creating reality.

literature based reading series told us that if a nonreader just sat in a heterogeneous group long enough the student would learn to read. "Trust me," she said. "Even the ESL children will learn to read!" An observant teacher knows that this is not always the case. I have finally gotten the courage to stand up to inappropriate university research recommendations. I use flexible groups to teach children who need particular forms of instruction. And I have documented success for these urban and culturally diverse children. (WS, LM: 1/30/91, pp. 4-5)

The rule for me now is watch the children, trust them and other teachers, take papers with a grain of salt and don't trust anybody who hasn't spent a long time in a classroom and don't assume that your children will get any outside help.

I love teaching. I have loved every one of the four years I have been teaching. I have never worked with a group of people whom I admire as much, who are as dedicated to their jobs. No matter what is done to frustrate them, ignore them, or put roadblocks in their way teachers do their job to the best of their abilities because the children deserve it. (WS, LM: 1/30/91, pp. 5-6)

The issue of improving teaching is more than finding out how to teach teachers to teach better and more quickly, and teachers know this. If we are to truly make the improvements in education that are desperately needed we all need to take a more holistic view of the problems including the teacher, the classroom, the curriculum, the structure and habits of school districts and administrators and the parents and community who send their children to us. One small way to begin is for teachers and researchers to join together in collaboration and respect. It can not be well accomplished separately. We need a unified "voice" to make the changes our children deserve. We need to meet each other in a new role. (WS, LM: 1/30/91, p. 4)

Postscript

What can we conclude from Leslie's story? It is my preference, in the spirit of knowledge creation, not to write a formal conclusion here which might be read as prescriptive, but to ask readers to conclude from their own perspectives. But in an attempt to develop perceptual collaboration with this paper's audience, I'll compromise. I'll talk a little about what *I've* learned from working collaboratively with Leslie and the other teachers in our group.

1. I've learned about the supporting conditions for developing voice which I can use in my work as a teacher educator and in my research programs:

   a. A commitment to the process and relationship

   b. Regular conversations about the problems and successes of practice

   c. Detailing differences between public perceptions and private realities of schooling

   d. Ongoing, nonjudgmental support and response to teachers' perceptions

   e. Encouraging teacher research of their own practices

f. Providing an audience for teachers' voices

g. Valuing teachers ways of knowing (centered on children and caring)

2. I've learned to trust that, if I sit with uncomfortable periods long enough, I can make sense of difficult and complex data. I've learned to value the honest ambiguity in research.

3. I've learned to risk my own voice by watching teachers do so. I'm learning to reclaim my voice in writing--and to risk its rejection in academic circles. The private words need less restraint than I had been giving them to come to the surface. The words in this paper just flowed out beneath thought and surprisingly appeared on paper (see Goldberg, 1990). It was a joy to write.

4. I'm learning to become intimate with others in my teaching and my research. To permit the connecting relationships I honestly desire in all phases of my life. To risk real feelings: anger, frustration, joy, excitement, exhaustion. To allow teachers to come and go as they need--and know that our caring connects us no matter where we are. The change has also affected my work. I write with teachers, not about them. It's given me an entirely different perspective for my data interpretations.

5. I've come to believe that the perceptual discrepancies between administrators and teachers do not have to be so great. Understanding and change is possible. Because working with multiple viewpoints has helped me understand the role of epistemological perspective and common intention, I've become more tolerant of other well-meaning epistemological views. I obviously disagree with the system of choice as it was implemented in Leslie's district, but only because I learned to do so by listening to her story. There is great promise in Leslie's hope that administrators who hear her story will hear the intention undergirding the message and come to know the value of including teacher choice and voice. Perhaps the close-up view that Leslie and other teachers provide will be the bridge to understanding very real risk of children's distances from school.

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